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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASMARA 000239

SIPDIS

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PREL

SUBJECT: RELEASE OF ARRESTED AMCIT EMBASSY EMPLOYEE AFTER 4
DAY INTERROGATION

REF: A. ASMARA 232

[1](#)B. ASMARA 229

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4(d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. On July 14, pol/econ assistant Helen Tesfazion, a dual Eritrean-American citizen, was arrested, held in a small cell, and interrogated for four days at an unknown location in Keren, 60 miles from Asmara, Eritrea. She was released on July 18th, after being told she was a spy, doing the dirty work of the embassy's Americans who could not travel freely, and recruiting the youth of Eritrea to come to America. By not notifying the embassy of her arrest or allowing consular access to her, the Eritrean Government (GSE) violated the Vienna Convention. END SUMMARY.

FIRST ARREST OF AMCIT EMBASSY EMPLOYEE

[1](#)2. (C) On July 13, pol/econ assistant Helen Tesfazion began a five-day trip outside of Asmara to meet with community organizations. On the evening of July 14, she, the embassy driver, and a representative from NUEYS (National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students) departed Keren and made a routine stop at a road checkpoint. An unidentified man entered the embassy vehicle and ordered the embassy driver to the nearest police station. Ms. Tesfazion was then driven to an unmarked building guarded by soldiers and told she was under arrest. She was locked in a small urine-covered unfurnished concrete room.

INTERROGATION

[1](#)3. (C) The next morning started four days of interrogation by a man knowledgeable of embassy affairs. He wanted to know if she had distributed any reading materials on this trip, what she did in the pol/econ section, and what kind of special privileges she received from the embassy. She was asked about why she was Catholic and if she knew anything about the Jehovah's Witnesses and Evangelical Christians in the country. The interrogator raised specific details about people, projects, and events at the embassy.

[1](#)4. (C) A second interrogator attempted to lecture and intimidate Ms. Tesfazion. He said the CIA was encouraging

Eritrea's youth to leave the country, and that one of their methods of recruitment was through the evening lecture series sponsored by the embassy. He stated that since the travel of American diplomats was restricted, the embassy was using its local employees to spy, and that she was being used by the embassy "to do their dirty work."

VIENNA CONVENTION ON CONSULAR RELATIONS (VCCR) IGNORED

15. (C) The embassy driver, not the GSE, notified the embassy of Ms. Tesfazion's arrest. The embassy FSN investigator, in Keren the next day, asked several times for access but was denied. The GSE's lack of notification and access violates Article 36 of the VCCR, as does the mistreatment of Ms. Tesfazion while being held. For four days she was held in a dirty room without a toilet, bed or bedding, heat, or protection from mosquitoes. Although sick with vomiting and diarrhea, she did not receive any medical care. Almost all her local currency, equivalent to USD\$100, was stolen after being confiscated by authorities.

16. (C) COMMENT: Ms. Tesfazion is the 45th embassy LES to be arrested since 2001, but the first American. The tactics used were not surprising or new, nor was the mention of the many details given by the interrogator regarding the day-to-day workings of the embassy, since it is known that many LES report to the GSE. The multiple violations of the VCCR were standard practice for the GSE. Although we contacted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs numerous times regarding Ms. Tesfazion's arrest, our calls went unanswered.

ASMARA 00000239 002 OF 002

MCMULLEN